Brahma,deva Sutta
The Brahma,deva Discourse
[The High God does not need any offering]
(Saṅyutta Nikāya 6.3/1:140-142)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2004

1 Sutta summary
This short instructive discourse, with a gentle touch of spiritual humour, is about a woman who worships Brahmā (or God), regarded in ancient India as the creator god; yet her own son is an arhat. Brahmnā himself comes down from his heaven and appears before a brahminee (the monk Brahma,deva’s mother), admonishing her on the futility of her offerings, since brahmās do not partake of earthly offerings, but subsist on dhyanic joy. More importantly, Brahmnā instructs the brahminee not to cast her religious sight too far away, when heaven lies right before her, in her own son: that her offerings would yield great fruit if she were to offer them to her own arhat son, Brahma,deva.

The Saṅyutta Commentary tells a similar story about Shakra, who on seeing the people of Anga and Magadha making preparations for a great sacrifice to Mahā Brahmā, feels pity for them. Appearing to them in the guise of Brahmā, he advises them to take their offerings to the Buddha and listen to his teachings. (SA 1:351 f)

Long before the rise of modern theism, the Buddha has already pointed to finding life’s answer and liberation within oneself, not in an external power, real or imagined. As long as we do not realize that we create our own God or gods, and that they are but hypostases of our desire for control and power, we will continue to find spiritual answers outside of ourselves, and fail to see the godliness and goodness within.

2 Where prayer does not help
The Ādiya Sutta (A 5.41) refers to “offering to devas” (deva,balī), which is somewhat problematic. The Pali Canon clearly records the Buddha as declaring that prayer does not bring one spiritual release. The Ittha Sutta (A 5.43), given by the Buddha to Anāthapiṇḍika, is very instructive:

Householder, there are these five things that are desirable, beloved and agreeable but difficult to obtain in the world. What are the five?
Long life, beauty, happiness, fame, and rebirth in heaven.
Of these five things, householder, I do not teach that they are to be obtained through prayer (āyicāna,hetu) or through wishing (patthanā,hetu). If one could obtain them through prayer or through wishing, who would not obtain them?
For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have long life, it is not proper that he should pray for long life or take delight in doing so. He should rather follow a way of life that is conducive to long life [such as the practice of giving, moral conduct and mental cultivation]. By following such a path, he would obtain long life, be it divine or human.
For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have beauty, … He should rather follow a way of life that is conducive to beauty…
For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have happiness, … He should rather follow a way of life that is conducive to happiness…
For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have fame, … He should rather follow a way of life that is conducive to fame…
For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have rebirth in heaven, it is not proper that he should pray for rebirth in heaven or take delight in doing so. He should rather follow a way

1 A 5.41/3:45.2(4e). However, from the context, we know that the Buddha is addressing those ancient Indians who are following such practices. As such, this is a teaching whose meaning has to be drawn out (neyy’attha) and culturally bound, and not to be taken as universally applicable.

2 “Wishing,” patthanā, also “desire, request, aspiration, request, prayer, vow.”
of life that is conducive to rebirth in heaven [such as the practice of giving, moral conduct and mental cultivation]. By following such a path, he would obtain rebirth in heaven.

(A 5.43/3:47-49 abridged) = SD 47.2

The Brahma,deva Sutta speaks not only against “muttering prayers” and making offerings to some external power, but admonishes one instead to invest one’s piety and charity in the virtue of a spiritual practitioner. The true “God” or highest goodness is not out there in heaven, but in one’s spiritual life; in this case, that goodness is found in the arhat Brahma,deva.

3 The true path to Brahmā

In verse 565 of the Brahma,deva Sutta, Brahmā Sahampati the brahminee: “You know not the path to Brahmā, so why mutter prayers.” The Sānyutta Commentary says brahma,patha [v565d] is a name for the 4 wholesome dhyanas (kusala-j,jhānāni). The resultant dhyanas (vipaka-j,jhānāni) are called their path of living (jīvita,patha). Ignorant of this path, why do you mutter prayers? For the brahmās subsist on dhyanic joy (sappātīka-j,jhānena yāpentī), they do not eat curdled milk sprinkled with herbs and seeds (SA 1:207). In the Tevijja Sutta (D 13), Dhānaṇījīni Sutta (M 97) and Subha Sutta (M 99), the path to Brahmā, described as the four form dhyanas, is called the path to “fellowship with Brahmā” (brahmānaṇ sahavyatā).

The locus classicus for brahma,patha (or brahma,sahavyatā), in the Buddhist sense, is the Tevijja Sutta (D 13), where the Buddha explains to Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja that the “highest path” or “the path to Brahmā” is none other than the “fruits of recluseship” (samaṇna,phala). Here, however, in keeping with the spiritual level of the duo, the Buddha speaks fully of moral virtue, but mentions only the first dhyanas, and concludes with the cultivation of lovingkindness. The full “fruits of recluseship” are detailed in the Sāmaṇṇa,phala Sutta (D 2).

4 Samvega

To show Brahma,deva’s mother the futility of her misplaced piety and to put her on the “true path,” Brahmā Sahampati thinks, “This brahminee, Brahma,deva’s mother, has been making a regular offering to Brahmā. Let me approach her and rouse samvega [a sense of urgency] in her” [6]. Two important religious powers are at play here: the first is that of Brahmā’s theophany; the other is the arousing of samvega (a sense of urgency) in the brahminee. In the first case, we see the Indian conception of darśana (P dassana), or the “seeing” of holy persons, which in itself is regarded as a great blessing:

Seeing recluses—this is most auspicious (samaṇṇa ca dassanam | etam mangalam uttaman) (Maṅgala Sutta, Sn 266 = Khp 5)

A concept closely connected with the “seeing” of the Buddha and holy persons is that of samīvega, “sense of urgency,” which the Pali-English Dictionary defines as “agitation, fear, anxiety; thrill, religious emotion (caused by contemplation of the miseries of the world).” It is one of the most powerful of Buddhist terms that refers to a sort of spiritual crisis that results from directly perceiving the truth. For a lay person, this usually results in disillusionment with worldly life, often leading to renunciation, whereas in the case of a monastic, it urges him to exert more energy in spiritual practice until the goal is attained. “A feeling of urgency,” samīvega, that is, an overpowering experience of awe or a religious experience that induces one to ask deep questions of life and seek their answers.

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4 D 13/1:235-252 = SD 1.8.
5 D 2/1:47-86 = SD 8.10.
6 See Somanassa S (It 2.1.10) = SD 16.13.

http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com or http://www.dharmafarer.org
The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) and the Saṅvega Sutta (A 4.118) list the four places that arouse feelings of urgency (saṅvejanīya-ṭhānā) as those where the Buddha was born, where he awakened, where he gave the first discourse, and where he attained final nirvana.  

The Canon gives a number of examples of samvega. The Cūla Tathāga, saṅkhaya Sutta (M 37) records how Moggallāna rouses a sense of urgency (for spiritual development) in Shakra, Vessavaṇa and the gods of the 33 by making the celestial Vejayanta Palace quake and tremble through his psychic powers (M 37.11/1:254 f). The Vana Saṅyutta (ch 9 of the Saṅyutta Nikāya) consists of 14 suttas all dealing with the rousing of the sense of urgency for spiritual development (S 9/1:197-205). In the Mahā Hatthipamapama Sutta (M 28), Sāriputta speaks of samvega.

5 An arhat is not reborn

The last two paragraphs of §3 of the Brahma,deva Sutta says:

He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more for this state of being.”

And the venerable Brahmadeva became one of the arhats.

Khīṇā jāti vāsitaṁ brahmacarīyaṁ katoṁ karanīyaṁ nāparam itthattāyā ti abbhaṅṇāsi. Aññataro ca pan’ āyasma Brahmadevo arahataṁ ahosi.

This is the canonical stock passage describing the attainment of arhathood. The sutta Commentary says that the sentence beginning “He directly knew…” refers to “the plane of reviewing” (paccavekkhāna, bhinnā) (SA 1:205). Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his Saṅyutta translation, makes the following useful note:

The commentaries propose two ways of interpreting nāparaṁ itthattāya, depending on whether the last word is taken as dative or ablative. [SA:] “Now there is no development of the path again done ‘for this state’ (itthabhāvāya = itthattāya as dative), that is, for the state of the sixteen tasks or for the destruction of the defilements. (The ‘sixteen tasks’ are the four tasks of the path—full understanding, abandonment, realization and development)—taken in conjunction with each of the four supramundane paths.) Or alternatively: itthattāya = itthabhāvato (the ablative, “beyond thisness”). Now there is no further continuum of aggregates. These five aggregates stand fully understood like a tree cut down at the root.”

I take itthattāya as a dative meaning “for this state of being,” ie for existence in any state of being, so that the phrase conveys the same sense as the alternative “roar of liberation,” nathī dānī punabbhavo, ‘Now there is no renewed existence.’” Elsewhere (eg at D 1:17,33; M 2:130,16 ff; A 1:63,30-64,18) itthatta signifies the human state (or perhaps the entire sensory realm) as contrasted with the higher states of being. As the stem form itthatta is clearly neutral, it is difficult to accept the commentarial explanation of itthattāya as an ablative. (S:B 433 n376; citations normalized)

6 Some difficult terms

6.1 Upadhi. The verses of the Brahma,deva Sutta have many epithets of the arhat, the most important or difficult of which will be discussed here. The arhat is said to be “without acquisitions” (nirūpadhīka) [v566b], that is, he is free of the upadhi of defilements, volitional formations, and sensual pleasures. The Porāṇa-tīkā says that “the upadhi of aggregates” is not mentioned because they still exist. The Pali

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7 D 16.5.8/2:140; A 4.118/2:120 f.
8 For a more detailed study of samvega, see Mahā Parinibbāna S (D 16) = SD 9 Intro (7f).
9 As at S 56.11/5:422,3-30.
10 See S 22.27/3:29,30; etc.
11 Qu by S:B 434 n380.
term *upādi* if often translated as “clinging” (from *upa* + *ā* + *dā* “to take”), and is often confused with the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *upadhi* or *upādhi* (meaning “remnant, substrate,” or more correctly, “acquisitions” or “belongings,” attachment to which leads to rebirth). Despite the subtle but important difference in meaning, most modern commentators regard them as synonymous, and do not try to explain how and why the difference arose.12

**6.2 Atideva,patto.** Another interesting epithet of the arhat is that he is one “who has surpassed the devas” (*atideva,patto*) [v566b], that is, he has attained to the state beyond that of a deva above the devas, the state of a brahmā above the brahmās (SA 1:207). Although the Commentary is silent here, there is evidently a pun on Brahma,deva’s name. The *Culla Niddesa* speaks of three kinds of devas:

…[there are] three kinds of devas, namely, devas by convention (*sammati,devā*), devas by birth (*upapatti,devā*) and devas by purity (*visuddhi,devā*).

Who are devas by convention? Kings, princes, and queens: they are called devas by convention.

Who are devas by birth? The Four Great Kings [Cātum,mahārājā], the 33 Devas [Tāvataṁsa], the Yāma devas, the Tusita devas, the devas who delight in creation, the devas who lord over the creations of others, the devas of Brahma’s Host, and devas beyond them: these are devas by birth [born devas, congenital devas].

What are devas by purity? The Tathāgata’s disciples who are arhats whose mental cankers are destroyed and the pratyeka Buddhas: these are devas by purity.

“The Blessed One is the deva beyond devas” means that, by having known, weighed, recognized [judged], understood, and by having made clear, (knows) by direct knowledge, he is a superior deva (*adhi,deva*) amongst conventional devas, by direct knowledge he is “superior deva” amongst the devas by birth, by direct knowledge he is “superior deva” amongst the devas of purity.

(Nc:Se 30/312/653; Nc:Be 226; cf Vbh 422)13

The term *atideva,patto*, “who has surpassed the devas,” in the Brahma,deva Sutta, given as an epithet of the arhat, clearly refers to the last of the three kinds of devas, that is, the “deva by purity” (*visuddhi,deva*).

**6.3 Akiñcana.** Another term used in the Brahma,deva Sutta to describe the arhat is one “owning nothing” (*akiñcana*) [v566c]. A *Dhammapada* verse—in the Brahma Vagga—reflects the same sentiment:

For whom, in front and behind, yassa pure ca pacchā ca
And in the middle, there is nothing, majjhe ca n’atthi kiñcanaṁ
Who has nothing, ungrasping, akiñcanaṁ anādānaṁ
Him I call a brahmin. tam ahaṁ brāhmaṇaṁ
(Nc:Se 30/312/653; Nc:Be 226; cf Vbh 422)

For one “who has nothing” (*akiñcanaṁ*), there is no “grasping through craving” in the three aspects (past, future, present) (DhA 26.38/4:230).

The Commentary on the *Na Santi Sutta*,14 explaining the line, “Sufferings torment not one who has nothing” (*akiñcanaṁ nāmupatanti dukkhā*), says that the arhat is devoid of the “something,” namely, lust (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) (SA 1:63). In the *Mahā Vedalla Sutta* (M 43) and the *Goddatta Sutta* (S 41.7) the arhat is also said to be one “owning nothing”:

*Rāgo kho āvuso kiñcana, doso kiñcana, moho kiñcana, Te khīṇ āsavassava bhikkhuno pahīnā ucchinnamālā tālāvatthu,kaṭaṁ anabhāvavatā ayatiṁ anuppāda,dhammā.*

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14 S v104 = 1.34/1:23.

[34] [http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com](http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com) or [http://www.dharmafarer.org](http://www.dharmafarer.org)
Friends, lust is something; hate is something; delusion is something. In a monk whose cankers have been destroyed, they [lust, hate, delusion] are abandoned, uprooted, made like palm stump, done away with so that they are no longer subject of future arising.

(M 43.36/1:298 = S 41.7/4:297)

The Commentary to the Accharā Sutta\(^{15}\) says that there are 4 ways a monk uses his alms:
1. an immoral monk uses them (undeservedly) like a thief;
2. a virtuous ordinary person who does not reflect on them is like a debtor;
3. a trainee (sekhā, ie one of the seven kinds of saints, short of the arhat-become) uses them as an inheritance;
4. an arhat uses them as a worthy owner.

(AA 1:71 f)

Paradoxically here, the arhat is regarded as the “owner” of the almsfood, that is, in the sense that he has lived the holy life to its fullest, that by owning “nothing,” he has, as it were, everything. As he creates no new karma, he will face no karmic fruit.

6.4 Anañña, posiyō, “supporting no other” [v566c], that is, the arhat does not maintain a wife and children, harbours no passion, nor will he maintain another body after the present one (SA 1:207).\(^{16}\) Discourses such as the Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122)\(^{17}\) and the ancient Khagga,visāṇa Sutta (Sn 35-75),\(^{18}\) speak of the dangers of socializing without focusing on one’s personal development, and of the dangers of evil friends.

It is important to understand here that this teaching of spiritual solitude is not that of an anti-social hermitry, but rather that mental cultivation or meditation can only be effectively by oneself alone. A truly spiritual person is always alone, but never lonely (not missing anyone); he may be with the crowd (for its benefit), but he is never of the crowd—he is a lotus above troubled waters. In the quest for mental focus leading to spiritual liberation, one has to travel the path alone.

Furthermore, it should be said that when one is faced with the greatest of difficulties or when one is at the height of true success, one will inevitably be by oneself. This is the nature of existential suffering: one faces one greatest pains alone. Only when one has stepped down from that pinnacle of pain or of triumph, that one finds oneself in the company of others again. One enters this world alone; one leaves it alone. One can only understand both in one’s aloneness. Yet, when one realizes that there is no self or abiding entity, one transcends even such aloneness.

6.5 Pacchā, puratthaim. “For him [the arhat] there is nothing behind nor in front” (na tassa pacchā na purattham atthi) [v568a]. The sutta Commentary explains: What is “behind” (pacchā) is the past; what is “in front” (puratthā) is the future. He has nothing behind him and nothing in front because he is without desire or lust for past and future aggregates (SA 1:207).

In the four Bhaddarakatta Suttas (M 131-134)—spoken respectively by the Buddha, by Ānanda, by Mahā Kaccāna, and by the Buddha to Lomasakā’niya—the practitioner is admonished to train his mind on the present moment, watching it with insight, thus:

Let one not go back after the past,
Nor harbour fond hope for the future.
For what is past has passed away,
And the future has not yet come. \(^{19}\)

(M 131-134/3:187-202)

The benefits of the practice exhorted by the Bhadd’eka, rattā Suttas are mentioned in the Araññe Sutta (S 1.10), where a forest deva asks the Buddha why the monks meditating in the forests, living only on a

\(^{15}\) A 1.6.3-5/A 1:10 f.
\(^{16}\) See Sn 65 = Ap 11; U 4 = 31.
\(^{17}\) M 122/3:108-118 = SD 11.4: see esp Intro.
\(^{18}\) Sn 1.2/pp6-12 = vv35-75.
\(^{19}\) = Ap 545.20-23/506; Nett 149); also see Dh 348, 421; Sn 949; Tha 537. See SD 8.9.
single meal a day, look very serene. The Buddha’s reply, echoing of the sentiment of the Bhadd’eka,ratta Suttas, thus:

They do not sorrow after the past,  
Nor do they long for the future.  
They keep themselves to what is before them—  
Hence their demeanour is so serene.

Through longing for the future,  
Through sorrowing after the past,  
Fools dry up and wither away  
Like green reed that is cut down. (S 1.10/1:5)

6.6 Vidhumo [v568b]. The Commentaries explain: He is smokeless (vi- + dhūmo, “without smoke”) because he has destroyed the smoke of anger (SA 1:207; SnA 405 ad Sn 460, kodha,dhūma,vigamena). The Cūla Niddesa (Nc 576), commenting on Sn 1048 (the last stanza of the Puṇṇaka Māṇava Pucchā), gives a long exegesis. The word appears in the Amba,sakkhara Peta,vatthu (Pv 4.1.34a), where its Commentary glosses it as “rid of the smoke of wrong thought” (vigata,micch, PvA 230). The verb, “it smokes,” is dhūmayati or dhūmayati, has both a literal sense of “it smokes, smoulders, chokes,” and a metaphorical sense of “it obscures, clouds over.” The metaphorical sense is found in the Vammika Sutta (M 23), where, in the parable of the anthill, the anthill “fumes by night and flames by day” (vammiko rattin dhūmāyati divā pajjalatī). The venerable Kumāra Kassapa explains that “the anthill” represents the body; and

“it fumes by day” means “when one, by night, repeatedly thinks about and repeatedly ponders on one’s actions during the day” (yaṃ kho…divā kammante ārabbhā rattinī anuvitakketi anuvicarati); and

“it flames by night” means “the actions one undertakes during the day through body, speech and mind after thinking and pondering on them by night” (yaṃ kho…ratti anuvitakketvā anuvicāre tvā divā kammante payojeti kāyena vācaya manasā). (M 22.4/1:144)

It is clear from the references quoted so far that “smoke” (both as verb and noun) usually refers to the habit of negative thinking or the nature of an ill-trained mind.

6.7a Nikkhitta,daṇḍo tasa,thāvaresu, “One with rod laid down towards the moving and the still [the firm and the frail]” [v568c]. The arhat is totally harmless towards all forms of living beings, and is utterly compassionate to them. The expression, “one with rod laid down” (nikkhitta,daṇḍo), is also in the Revati Vimāna, vatthu, identical to the Revati Peta,vatthu:

Who, coming from the deva world to the human world, when asked, should speak to me thus:  
“Give gifts to those who have laid down the rod; give clothing, lodging, food and drink.  
For the miserly, the angry, the evil-natured, obtains not the fellowship of those heaven-bound.”

Ko deva,lokato manussa,loka, gantuṃno putṭho me evān vadeyya: Nikkhitta,daṇḍesu dadaṭha dānāṃ, acchādanāṃ seyyam ath’anna,pañāṃ, Na hi macchari rosako pāpa,dhammo, saggāpāgānaṃ labhati sahavyataṃ  
(Vv 5.2.19 f/79 = Pv 4.4.19 f/61; See Vv:H 106)

6.7b Tasa,thāvara, “the moving and the still” [v568c], is a common expression in the Pali Canon. The Saññhutta Commentary says that the “moving” are the worldlings (pūtthijñāna), the “still” are those “with cankers destroyed” (khīṇāsāvā), that is, the arhats (SA 1:207). According to the Pali-English Dictionary (PED), the term tasa is metaphorically used of people who are in fear and trembling, as

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20 For further discussion, see Bhadd’eka,ratta Sutta (M 131) = SD 8.9 Intro (4).
21 See M 2:105 = Tha 876; Sn 146, 394, 629, 704; Nn 2:487 f (x5).
distinguished from thāvara, a self-possessed and firm being (= arhat, KhA 245). In this sense, tasa is derived from tasati both in the sense of:

(1) Skt tryyati, to be thirsty; fig: to crave (S 2:13, Miln 254), and
(2) Ved trasati, to tremble, shake, to have fear, to be frightened (Sn 394, Nc 479, KhA 245).

Andersen equates tasa with the Sanskrit trasasa, and explains it as “moving, trembling, feeble” (Pali Glossary 111). The PED also says that thāvara is always used in connection with tasa, contrasting or comprising the movable beings (animal world) and the immovable (vegetable world), and quotes Sn 394, It 31 f as examples.

Most traditional translators render tasa vā thāvarā vā (Sn 146b) as “the frail or the firm” or such like, and interpret it as referring to those who still have craving (tasā) and the arhats (thāvarā) respectively, in keeping with the Commentary (KhA 245). These beings should be included in our lovingkindness. Unawakened beings may need our lovingkindness; but arhats do not need our thoughts so that they may “be happy-minded” (Sn 147d). Arhats are beyond good and evil, and have transcended happiness and sorrow. However, we should include them so that our lovingkindness is truly all-inclusive positive emotion.

On the other hand, arhats (like the Buddha) are not “beings” (sattā) as we know them, as they have gone beyond classification (Sn 209d). Scholars like KR Norman and L Schmithausen take the expression in the sense of “(all beings) moving and unmoving”; Schmithausen however believes that, from a historical viewpoint, the expression refers to “animals and plants.” Norman gives this etymology: tasa < Skt trasasa, “moving,” ie “the collective body of moving or living beings” [syn: jāgama, cala] as opposed to sthāvara, “standing still, stationary, not moving, fixed, stable, immovable” (SED svv) [cf sthāvara → P thera, “elder monk.”]

6.8 Visenē, bhūta, “aloof from the crowd” [v568a], which the Sañyutta Commentary, following a popular idiom, explains as “disarmed, without the army of defilements” (kilesa, senāya visenē jāto) (SA 1:207). Like Bodhi (S:B 435 n382), I follow KR Norman’s suggestion: “The verb viseneti (S 3:89,31) is explained (SA 2:296,22): viseneti no usseneti ti vikirati ti sampiññeti. [“Viseneti means ‘not associating,’ that is, not mixing with, not combining.”] The BHS form, however, is visĕrenĕti, implying a denominative verb from višrenĕti. The meaning of višrenĕti would presumably be “without association, not associating.” In the Udāna, varga (Uv 11.12), we find viṣeṇi-kṛtvā, translated into Tibetan to mean “free from the crowd” (S:B id).

6.9 Ogha, tiṇṇam, “crossed the flood” [v570c], here metaphorically refers to the 4 “floods” (oghā) (see the Ogha Sutta).

(1) The flood of sensuality (kām ‘oghā) = lustful desire for the five cords of sensual pleasure (pleasant forms, etc) (kāma, gungā).

(2) The flood of existence (bhav ‘oghā) = lustful desire for form-sphere existence and formless-sphere existence and attachment to dhyanas.
(3) The flood of views (diṭṭhi ‘oghā) = the 62 [bases of] wrong views) (D 1:12-38).
(4) The flood of ignorance (avijj ‘oghā) = not knowing the four noble truths.

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23 See Sn:P n26:24d.
26 See Aṅgulimālā S (M 86.18n = SD 5.11); also Sn:P n8:4b for further details.
27 see BHSD sv.
28 Sn:N 307 f n793.
30 S 45.171/5:59.
31 See M 13.7 = SD 6.9, A 6.63.3b = SD 6.11.
The Commentary explains that they are called “floods” because they keep beings submerged inside samsara and do not allow them to rise up to higher states and to nirvana (SA 1:17).[^32]

[^32]: On the flood imagery, see also S vv 298-300, 511-513, 848 f.
The Brahma,deva Discourse  
(S 6.3/1:140-142)

Brahmadeva’s arhathood

1 Thus have I heard.
   At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anātha/piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s Forest near Sāvatthī.
2 Now at that time, a certain brahminee had a son named Brahma,deva who had gone forth from the household life into homelessness in the presence of the Blessed One.
3 Then, dwelling alone, aloof (from society), heedful, exertive, and resolute, in no long time, he reached and remained in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which sons of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for himself right here and now.
   He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done is what had to be done, there is no more for this state of being.”
   And the venerable Brahmadeva became one of the arhats.33

Brahmā appears to Brahmadeva’s mother

4 Then, in the morning, the venerable Brahma,deva, having dressed himself and taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvatthī for alms. Walking on the unbroken almsround34 in Sāvatthī, he came to his own mother’s house. [141]
5 Now at the time, the brahminee, Brahmadeva’s mother, had been making a regular offering to Brahmā.35
6 Then it occurred to Brahmā Sahampati:
   “This brahminee, Brahma,deva’s mother, has been making a regular offering to Brahmā. Let me approach her and rouse samvega [a sense of urgency]36 in her.”
7 Then, just as a strong man might stretch his arm out or bend it back, Brahmā Sahampati disappeared from the Brahmā world and reappeared in the residence of the brahminee, Brahmadeva’s mother.
8 Then, standing mid-air, Brahmā Sahampati addressed the brahminee, Brahmadeva’s mother, in verse:

Brahmā Sahampati’s verses

565 Far from here, brahminee, is the Brahmā world,
   To which you make a regular offering.
   Brahminee, Brahmā is not a partaker of such food.
   You know not the path to Brahmā, so why mutter prayers.37
566 Brahminee, this Brahma,deva

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33 The last two paras here: Khīṭā jāti vāsitaṁ brahmacariyaṁ kataṁ karānīyaṁ nāparam itthattāyā ti abhaṅṅāsī. Aḥṅṭaṭaro ca paṅ āyasma Brahmadevo arahatām aho. This is the canonical stock passage describing the attainment of arhathood. Comy says that the sentence beginning “He directly knew…” refers to “the plane of reviewing” (paccavekkhaṇa, pātisā). (SA 1:205). See Intro (5).
34 Sapadānaṁ piṁḍāya caramāno. This is one of the 13 ascetic practices, ie going for alms along a predetermined route, without discriminating between regular givers and other, between those would give and those who would not. This is the practice of faring house-to-house for almsfood (sapadāṇa, cārik’anga) which is taken up with the resolution: lolappacāraṁ paṭikkhipāṇi, sapadāṇa, cārik’anga samādiyāni (I reject faring according to what is desired; I take upon myself the practice of the house-to-house farer.) On the 13 ascetic practices, see Vism 2.6/60, 2.31/67 f & SD 3.15 Intro (2).
35 Āhuṭīṁ niccam pāggaṇhāti. Comy details what appears to be an elaborate ceremony where milk-rice (pāyasa, piṁḍa) was offered to Brahmā along with invocations (SA 1:206).
36 Samvega, see Intro (4).
37 “The path to Brahmā,” brahma, patha. See Intro (3).
Is one without acquisitions,\(^{38}\) who has surpassed the devas,\(^{39}\)
Owning nothing,\(^{40}\) supporting no other:\(^{41}\)
(This) monk has entered your house for alms.

567 Worthy of offerings, knowledge-master, whose mind is cultivated:
He is one who deserves gifts from humans and devas.
Having pushed away evil, one without clinging,
Cooled, he comes seeking alms.

568 For him there is nothing behind nor in front:\(^{42}\)
At peace, smokeless,\(^{43}\) untroubled, one without desire.
One with rod laid down towards the moving and the still [the firm and the frail]\(^{44}\)—
Let him eat your offering, the foremost alms.

569 Aloof from the crowd,\(^{45}\) with peaceful mind,
He fares like a tamed elephant, unperturbed.
A monk of pure virtue, well liberated in mind—
Let him eat your offering, the foremost alms.\(^{46}\)

570 With bright faith in him, without wavering.\(^{47}\)
Place your offering in one worthy of it.
Having seen a sage who has crossed the flood,\(^{47}\)
Brahminee, make merit that leads to future happiness!”

Redactors’ verse

571 With bright faith in him, without wavering,
She placed her offering in one worthy of it.
Having seen a sage who has crossed the flood,
The brahminee made merit that leads to future happiness.\(^{48}\)

— evaṁ —

050422; rev 051017; 070924; 080422; 090801

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\(^{39}\) “Who has surpassed the devas,” \textit{atideva},\textit{patto}. See Intro 6.2.

\(^{40}\) “Owning nothing,” \textit{akiñcana}; a common epithet of an arhat. See Intro 6.3.

\(^{41}\) “Supporting no other,” \textit{anañña},\textit{posio}, ie that is, he does not maintain a wife and children, harbours no passion, nor will he maintain another body after the present one (SA 1:207). See Sn 65 = Ap 11; U 4 = 31.

\(^{42}\) Comy: What is “behind” (\textit{pacchā}) is the past; what is “in front” (\textit{purattha}) is the future. He has nothing behind him and nothing in front because he is without desire or lust for past and future aggregates (SA 1:207). See Intro (6.5).

\(^{43}\) Comy: He is smokeless (\textit{vidhūmo}) because he has destroyed the smoke of anger (SA 1:207). See Intro (6.6).

\(^{44}\) \textit{Nikkhitta,daṅgo tasa,thāvaresu}. See Intro (6.7).

\(^{45}\) “Aloof from the crowd,” \textit{viseni},\textit{bhūto}. See Intro (6.8).

\(^{46}\) On an attempt at categorizing an hierarchy of benefits of giving, see \textbf{Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S} (M 142/3:253-257) = SD 1.9.3.

\(^{47}\) “Crossed the flood,” \textit{ogha},\textit{tinnaṁ}. See Intro (6.9).

\(^{48}\) Comy: This verse was added by redactors (SA 1:208).